

# Server-side Includes

A **server-side include** is a snippet of HTML code in separate, external file that the web server dynamically copies into an HTML page before shipping it off to the client browser. That is, the HTML document doesn't contain this bit of code, only a reference to an external file, the "include," that contains the code. Let's say we have a standard page footer that should be incorporated on every page in our site. Rather than hard-code the footer in every HTML document, we can put the footer's code in a separate file that the server copies into the referencing HTML document just before the document downloads to the visitor's computer. The obvious benefit is that now we need to maintain that section of code in only one place instead of on every page in our site.

The HTML file for the "include" itself has a standard .htm or .html file extension and contains only the code to be included — no <html>, <head>, or <body> tags, for instance. For example, the code for a server-side include file might look like this:

```
<p>Copyright 2007 Penny McIntire. All rights reserved.</p>
```

To insert a server-side include from within Dreamweaver, select Insert > Server-Side Include, then browse to the file. The generated code might look something like this:

```
<!--#include file="file:footerCode.html" -->
```

It would seem that one of the best elements to put in a server-side include would be the main navigation. After all, that shows up on every page, right? The downside is that you can't disable the current link if the code that is copied in is identical for every page. You can, however, use CSS to make a current text link appear to be disabled, which can be an acceptable compromise. See the "Making a Hot Current Link Appear to be Disabled" sidebar (page 91) in Chapter 3 for more details on how to do this.

Be aware that you can't just test SSIs in the browser on your local PC unless you're within a development environment capable of displaying SSIs (like Dreamweaver) *and* running a local web server on your local computer. Installing the IIS server (included with Windows but not installed until you do it yourself) on your computer and testing your local site under it solves the problem.

Check with your web server administrator before attempting server side includes, because not all servers allow them, some require a special file extensions (.shtml), some require parameters that are set in certain ways, and some require a special file in the home directory.